

## AMENDMENT TO THE CLAIMS

Please enter the amendments below.

1. (Currently Amended) A process for desilicating nonwood plant fibers comprising:
  - (a) wet pre-pulping the nonwood plant fiber under controlled conditions of temperature, solids content, and with sufficient alkali to bring the pH within a pH range of 7 to about 11 and less than that required to dissolve all silica present in the fiber;
  - (b) removing both suspended solids and dissolved solids from the fibrous portion of the pre-pulped material by filtration or dewatering, or filtration and dewatering;
  - (c) adding acid to the filtrate to force the precipitation of solubilized silicate; and
  - (d) removing the silica and other solids from the filtrate, and reusing the filtrate in the pre-pulping step.
2. (Previously presented) The process of claim 1 wherein the resulting nonwood plant fibers is subsequently pulped chemically and/or mechanically, then bleached.
3. (Original) The process of claim 1 wherein the precipitated silica is used as a raw material for other applications.
4. (Previously Cancelled)
5. (Original) The process of claim 1 wherein the fiber is wet pre-pulped at a temperature of about 50°C to about 90°C.
6. (Original) The process of claim 1 wherein the fiber is wet pre-pulped to a solids content of about 0.5% to 6.0% solids.